

# Fortnightly Sermon

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## THE FULL BUSHEL.

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"Four pecks make a bushel."

A strange text, but I hope an honest one. 'Tis sure that it states a fact—a great virtue in a text. But possibly also it may be found a sort of sturdy Jacques, "full of matter" touching common life. It came before me thus: Two young gentlemen attended my preaching once on a time and listened to the sermon. I know not the exact time, nor what I said in that sermon; perhaps they also remember it not. There is nothing remarkable in these facts. After the sermon, the young gentlemen went forth like others of the congregation, and talked on the way, like the disciples going to Emmaus. I trust there is nothing remarkable in their talking awhile of the discourse they had heard. But the substance of their talk was noteworthy; for one said to the other: "I like to be told frequently that four pecks make a bushel." Now this was intended as a critical remark. It was supposed that the sermon had fallen short of the worth of the valuable fact that four pecks make a bushel. I mean not that I had dared deny that a bushel is four pecks, or had maintained aught unsorting therewith; but that I had not said anything of half so much moment to human beings as the fact or the statement that four pecks make a bushel. My sermon had been too remote, the young gentleman believed, from daily life in which the bushel is so valuable.

When this speech was told me, I saw much wisdom in it. As a critical remark, indeed, it may be overrated easily. For, as you know very well, I look on thought as a duty. I think young gentlemen and persons of all ages should like to be led to think sometimes, even if the elements of arithmetic be not the subject. I believe in the inspiring and helping power of a noble

and high thought, when it descends out of the heavens like a dove, or like a great storm, or like lightning. I believe in knowledge. It is quite plain to me that he will love the earth and the creatures on it best who knows most about the unfathomable life thereof, and the motions that manifest it. I think it well for the pulpit to try to help men to be reasonable. The first steamboat that ever was made was set upon and broken to pieces by a number of ignorant watermen, and no other was built for a hundred years. Suppose, now, that the schoolmaster had instructed those dear wooden-heads regarding the nature and value of that steamboat, and that the priest had roused in them a reverence for human thought and a wise forbearance in matters whereof they were ignorant. That little vessel would have found the open sea. It has been remarked that no one can say or imagine what differences in empires, in arts and manufactures, and in all the motions of human society we should be witnessing now. Besides, whatever be the value of knowledge and thought, it is right that all kinds of persons should have a share of consideration. As many persons *do* find joy in thinking, those whose heads limp too much for that exercise must stand by the wayside occasionally, and see the robust pleasure with which sound parts will climb a hill.

Therefore, be it said, the young gentleman's saying is not of profound critical value. Notwithstanding, it is wise, and I write this sermon on purpose to follow that counsel and to say over to you many times that four pecks make a bushel. For in truth it is impossible to say duly what an important fact this is, or with what profit we may remind ourselves of it continually.

The first thing that siezes the mind in this matter is the precept not to expect more than four pecks to the bushel; for, as four pecks make a bushel, so by no means can we get more out of a bushel than the four pecks. This, alas! seems a very hard lesson for human creatures to learn. The world appears full of people striving to get more out of their bushel than the exact four pecks which they have put in. This is really a matter of profound ethical philosophy, so deep indeed that few understand it. However often the truth may be set forth, people do go on just the same in their strange efforts to find more than the four pecks, just as even at this moment many sorry heads are dream-



ing after a perpetual motion, though it has been proved a folly ten thousand times.

One of the best expressions of this philosophy was uttered 1800 years ago, in the Sermon on the Mount. There it is stated that all things bear their own natural fruit, that everything has its own peculiar return and reward, of which it cannot fail; but that we must not expect also the returns belonging to other things. For thus I paraphrase the terse language of that great sermon. "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men to be seen of them; otherwise ye must look to men only for your reward. For the act then is done for renown among them; and this ye will have. But ye will have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, sound not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do, in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. There is an exact return that belongs to just that act, and they have that precise return. But there is a better alms, which is done when thou lettest not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth, so that the alms are in secret; and these alms have another reward, which comes from the Father, who seeth in secret and will give the return. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, think not that they gain nothing by this act; nay, they gain its own exact reward, just its own impartial measure of return in the praise of men and in a sounding reputation. But there is a better way. When thou prayest, go into thy closet and shut the door and pray to thy Father who is in secret. This secret prayer has its own reward which comes to thee directly. And the prayer in the street corners cannot bring the return that belongs to private devotion; neither can the secret prayer expect the returns which belong to the public exhibition in the synagogues. Neither the open nor the secret alms, and neither the private nor the ostentatious devotion shall fail of its own exact return, and neither of them can give what belongs to the other.

Turn your eyes on the world to see some of the examples with which it is crowded—examples of the unhappy struggle to

get by one way the reward which belongs to another way, to scrape out of a bushel more than its four pecks; an unhappy struggle indeed, for nature has set her face against such a business, and it comes to naught.

Everywhere you shall see men devoted with all the body and the soul to money-getting. They work hard, yea, often they toil very severely, for the laying up of great stores of possessions. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. The possessions they do obtain, and the power and the consideration in the world which go with these things they receive. But if such persons expect also to win admiration for their worth of mind, if they, having thought only of storing up matter, look to be possessed also of thoughts and knowledge, if they hope for noble company and rich companionship which come to sit down by the side of wisdom in the society of high minds and fecund thoughts, if they wish to surround themselves also with all these very choice things of life, then they are looking for more than the four pecks which are in the bushel.

But 'tis just so, too, if we turn and look the other way. For many persons there are who are so happy as to have room for the glorious exercise of mind. Either they have elected this blessed privilege, or they have been placed in its way by happy circumstance, or resolutely and nobly they wrest some time and strength for it from the toils of the day and the pleasures of the evening. And they have their reward. But they go grumbling that they have not also the other reward. They are not satisfied with the peace and joy, the serene intelligence, the clear depths of understanding in which nature is mirrored within them as the stars in a still pool—with these, I say, they are not satisfied, indeed they break them and destroy the calm peace which belongs to them because they go hungering and clamoring for the rewards which belong only to the stores of matter and not to the riches of mind. They wish to be wise and full of knowledge, and yet complain that with this they get not wealth also. They bemoan the poor returns which they get. Alas for them! I shut my eyes on them! they are scraping the bushel for more than its four pecks.

Others there are who seek only how to have pleasure, and know not what the great and blissful pleasures are. They waste

time in a giddy round of social business from which they glean few moments to think or even to feel, and indeed not enough to rest as they ought. They have their reward. The pleasures please, the dance or game or jest weaves its patterns like gay carpets on which light feet come and go or pretty wit plays its dazzles; and "such a hare is madness, the youth, to leap o'er the meshes of old age, the cripple," even though old age spread the mesh kindly, saying, "I hobble now because I did in my youth as you are doing!" But youth has its reward and is gay, bright and lissom. But sometimes a deeper chord is struck. The youth will sit entranced before some glorious eloquence of word or music or picture. For the first time, LIFE breaks on his eye, and it is seen to be a great deep sea. He will look up to some noble form borne on the breast of that life and tossed into the clouds by the heaving of that breast. He will be filled with a sincere reverence and sorrow before the eloquence, the grandeur of thought, the wideness of mind, and the great joys and independence that inhabit those heavens. He will envy that strength and beauty. But therein he is discontented with his bushel for holding only the four pecks which he has filled it withal.

Or again, there may be an unwise seclusion. Life is many-sided and rich in divers values. All are good, and particularly it is wise to come close to persons if we wish to keep life abounding in us and playing with a sweet rhythm on its shores. We see one person who is shut up in books; he is full of austere study; he applies himself in a cloister copying books into his head, as the old monks did on parchment. He has his reward. He will store up curious learning, science will unlock her treasures for him and history her riches. Yea, but if he expect also the powers of life and light, if he wish to know, or if he envy those who know, how a heart-beat feels when it strikes on another heart; if he look for the light of children's eyes to stream in at his window, then he expects more than four pecks, and with all his getting he has not got the understanding of the bushel.

You will meet many persons who are well satisfied with themselves. They are full of knowledge in their own eyes. They rejoice in their wisdom and wish no one to lead them. They understand not that humility which the Arabians enshrine



in a tale of a Calef who, being corrected by a wise man for an ungrammatical expression in Arabic, promptly ordered that the mouth of the scholar should be filled with jewels because of the benefit which it had conferred; neither do they remember that the least tincture of vanity shows that the mind cannot hold place with the first and grandest. But this satisfaction in self has its due reward. It is free from the pains of aspiration, from the pangs of a regretful ignorance, from the waste and burning of the fever to think and to do noble things worthy of the universe which has produced us and to drink of the fountains of everlasting beauty. All these pangs pass by and leave the self-contented soul calm and quiet. But if such a one expect also to learn, to grow, to improve, to do justice to the fire which burns in generous bosoms, to be gentle and considerate and careful not to encroach on the rightful freedom of another's will or mind, then he looks for too much in the bushel. He can take out only the four pecks he has put in.

You will see a selfish man. He has his reward. He can get and keep many things; he escapes much painful sympathy; he avoids much self-sacrifice. But very likely he wants to be loved, also; perhaps he groans at having no friends. This is merely foolish. He is trying to get more than four pecks in his bushel.

You will meet persons who take the great social step in life with no heart. The great social step is marriage. Whoever moves into that charmed circle without a companion the mere touch of whose hand is bliss, is torn to pieces by imps. Yet without regard to character or mind or love, to the stabilities of moral worth and a good heart shining in a clear eye, you will see an inheritance marry an inheritance, as men club funds for business; or, worse, if possible, a needy young man hunt out a fortune, like a luxurious bed, to lounge on it; or a girl take a husband who is unsound from the heart out and carries no mind behind his eyes, because he is rich. When a nobleman invited Coleridge to dine, he said, "I will send you my bill of fare." "Send me your bill of company," answered the poet. When two ask each other to that long entertainment at which they must sit and take life together, let them answer, "Tell me not what shall be on the table, but what you have in you for



company." There is a story of a young girl whose father urged on her a wealthy suitor whom she did not respect. He used the common arguments, not thinking for the moment of the wife whose daughter his daughter was, who lay asleep in the churchyard of the village home. But before the mother fell meekly asleep, she had left the diamond-drop of her womanhood in her girl.

"Father," she said, "have you a sovereign? give it me. How bright it is! and how heavy! it weighs very much in life, does, it not, Father? But why does it not speak to me?"

"Speak, my Child?"

"Yes, indeed, speak! Strange that something so mighty cannot speak! But perhaps it can think if it cannot speak, and walk and love and pray! it is so bright and shining! Can it do these things, Father?"

"What questions, Child!"

"But, Father, when I marry, I want somewhat that can talk with me, walk with me, think with me, love with me and pray with me. Until then, let me be only my Father's child."

Now, the law is plain. Four pecks make the bushel. If any one marry the sovereign, and expect also the joys of those things which the sovereign cannot do, he is raking for more in the four pecks of tinsel in the bushel.

But let these pictures pass by, as a panorama moves. The showman is tired of them, and in fact you may sit on a stone by any wayside and see hundreds of them. It is important to remember the one agreement in them all,—the unreasonableness of looking for more than four pecks in a bushel. Choose your ways of life and choose as men who mean to take the choice with all that it conveys. Remember simply that if you elect some things, you cannot have the reward of others, and that it is foolish and feeble to grumble at not having things the conditions of which you will not elect. You cannot be greedy and grab successfully, and at the same time be noble and distribute beautifully. You cannot be selfish and mean, and at the same time lovely and beloved. You must choose whether you will be a mere mill, giddy with the whirl of the grinding when there is grist, and giddy with the clatter when there is none; or whether you will be a well-informed and large-minded man. Be sure

simply that with whatever four pecks you fill your bushel, you will get nothing else out therefrom.

The second thing that strikes the mind touching this important science of the bushel, is this,—that as we cannot get more from a bushel than we have agreed to put in it, so we ought carefully to *give four full pecks for a bushel*. It will occur to you that this is the precept of common honesty. So it is. I hope indeed the honesty is very common. But what occurs to me now is that this is a very beautiful thing, this simple common honesty. The thoughts derived from the young gentleman's saying regarding the bushel lead us directly to a fine art. Consider. A customer wishes to buy something, be it food or cloth or shoes, or any other thing. The transaction is made. Exactly the equivalent is laid down in some other commodity or in the money which is the medium of exchange, and for that he receives exactly a full bushel of four pecks. It is done! What cleanness! what simplicity! what neatness! no loose ends or ravels appear, as in untidy work! all is complete, rounded, finished, symmetrical, as beautiful as a Greek face! Study that simple honesty. See how the social fabric glows by it. Look at it as an art, this matter of common honesty, a fine art. Think what an ignorant bungler he is who plots to give less than four pecks to a bushel. You perceive there is no art, no beauty, because nothing is finished. The act is involved in one long tangle and struggle with all other things. The mean deed is continually in the way, always tripping up some one, always half-showing its face, and then hiding again to peek out soon from some other corner. It becomes a source of disorder and doubt in everything. Beauty becomes impossible in its path, till that bushel of three and a half pecks is brought home and filled to the brim. If the chemist define dirt as matter out of place, what more natural than that ugliness consists in forms and things out of place. To give every one what belongs to him, that is, to put everything in its place, this is to make neatness, order, cleanliness, beauty. Dishonesty is the hideous dust and scattered implements of a room where carousal has been. Simple honesty is brimming with beauty. It becomes the face of a man. It makes him look clearly and straight into other faces. It makes the world good, glad, and graceful.

Finally, I see in this saying touching the bushel a glimpse of the value of the common precepts in morality and the common experience in religion. The common staples of the moral life—how satisfying they are, how good for the taste, digestion, and health! An excellent musician said to me, touching commonplace, “Remember that if a phrase be common, it is common because it is good.” So it is with authors. The greatest poets, those in whom human life is reflected most truly and grandly, are household names. Every one knows them and speaks of them. Only the foolish rake eccentric names out of obscurity as the touchstone of learning, or read and rend, like vultures, everything the press turns out. It is the common homely virtues, the daily experience, and the simple precepts voicing these, which are the fountains of life. I hold it bad to be a babbler of religion. Frantic experience-meetings or garrulous prayer-meetings and the noise of revivals are as profane, to my mind, as Babylonian rites. Between two or three let but a few words be said reverently touching the eternal mystery and the Great Name, and let silence follow. Sometimes the swell of emotion will rise like a great wave till it scatters its mist into the heavens and the stars drink it. ’Tis then like the ocean whose roar is not a chatter, but rests on deeps which bear up the sound, emitting none. But the sweet experience of daily gratitude and trust, the unspoken prayer which instantly is answered by a tide of will or endurance, the sudden thought of that Fatherhood of mystery which holds us like water-drops in a firmament, the peace amid difficulties, griefs, pains, disappointments, the simple patience and childlike kindness which disciplined natures bear about them, the simplicity, earnestness, fervor, love, forgiveness, repentance of every day—this is religion, common religion, sacred, serene and holy.

’Tis so with common morality and its precepts. They are the great things of life, and common because so needful. And the young gentleman wished them repeated; he wished to hear often that four pecks make a bushel. He was wise. It is well to tell the truth and it is wrong to tell untruths; even a little untruth is both wrong and mean. Be not siezed with too much wonder at this saying: I assure you it is quite true, and a very simple truth. It is well to be loving and gentle to your wife or



your husband, to be very tender to little children, to be kind to the unfortunate, to be chaste in act and speech, to be honest, to be faithful in friendship and true to your word in all things; it is well to be forbearing and forgiving, to return good for evil, to guard against spitefulness, to be generous in thought and deed, to try to help society on to a better state; it is well to be sober and temperate, to be cheerful and diffuse light about us. I assure you all these things are very true, and it is wise to say them over and over. But it will be wiser, and indeed a dawn of light and beauty like the creation sung by primeval poets, if we make these things as common in life as in words. These things, true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report—"if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think of these things."

"Had it been given me to write down my life  
Or only its beginning, but two lines,  
Upon a solid tablet of pure gold,  
How had I paused! how pondered o'er the task!  
Yet now, indeed, as children on their slates  
Write what is easily effaced, each man  
Writes with light hand but ineffaceably  
His life upon the heavy mass of days  
That towers behind us, dark, immovable,  
An up-piled cloudy wall of adamant,  
Infrangible, more solid than mere gold;  
He writes it, as a fate, on human hearts;  
He writes it on his own with iron pen!  
Then, writer! think, create, engrave with care."